

DWeb Principles: Context & Intent

Background

Around the world, people are creating the Decentralized Web (DWeb). The decentralized (or distributed) Web, is a Web in which the system and components of information communications technologies are not owned and controlled by centralized organizations and entities.

Individuals, organizations, companies, public agencies, and cooperatives are innovating to build and repurpose hardware, software, protocols, and social and organizational practices to make this new Web possible.

Purpose

The purpose of these principles is to define the ethical framework for those building and participating in the DWeb. It is to answer the question: What values and ethics do we uphold, beyond being a rejection of the problematic, powerful centralized forces of the Web we see today?

The aim is to identify our shared guiding principles through discussion, to be distilled into a living document that we can point to as a community. We seek to create a simple, easy to recite, set of ideas of universal utility as we design and build the Web of the future.

Beyond the document itself, the objective is to help set some ethical norms for the DWeb. If we all see ourselves as contributors to the Web, we hope these values will help people examine what they are building and for what purpose. It is to inspire projects that are driven by these values, and to hold each other accountable to ensure we continue to uphold them.

Process

Phase 1: Initial Draft — The stewards of the project, Mai and John, drafted a rough document for the DWeb community to discuss and consider. It was to be commented on and edited, May - June 2020. [COMPLETE]

Phase 2: First Feedback — Introduced the project to individuals in the DWeb community and solicited their comments and ideas. Presented the working draft at the DWeb Meetup on July 29, 2020. [COMPLETE]

Phase 3: Focus Groups — Hold a series of focus group conversations about the Principles to discuss intent, purpose, and future application. [COMPLETE]

Phase 4: Revise Principles — Incorporate feedback from focus group discussions into the draft Principles. [COMPLETE]

Phase 5: Second Feedback & Gather Support — Solicit final rounds of feedback on the Principles. Get signatories of support from individuals. [IN-PROGRESS]

Phase 6: Publish the Principles and Draft Manifesto — Launch first version of the Principles on the DWeb website. Hold DWeb Meet-up to launch new website and present Principles.. Begin draft of Manifesto. Feb 2021.

Stewards of the Project

Mai Ishikawa Sutton — Mai is passionate about expanding the digital commons and fostering mutual solidarity across technological projects. She believes that the potential of the decentralized Web lies in its ability to enable everyone, especially those historically oppressed and marginalized, to be active participants in their information and communication networks. Mai has a background in tech policy, facilitation, and writing.

John Ryan — John's work has focused on corporate strategy, while thinking as a mathematician and physicist, looking at ways to succeed where the technology is new and difficult, and the path to success not evident. He previously was part of the People Centered Internet project, with Vint Cerf and MeiLin Fung, and with the One Laptop Per Child project his wife co-led. John has more recently cofounded two startups based on decentralized technologies.

Why is the Internet Archive leading this effort?

The Internet Archive has been convening DWeb events since 2016, bringing people and organizations together to learn and support each other as we build the Decentralized Web. As one of the largest archives of online knowledge and culture, we have a stake in ensuring that the internet remains free and open beyond the grip of the big, centralized tech monopolies.

At the same time, "decentralization" has grown into such a buzzword across Silicon Valley that it started to lose its meaning. What was also becoming apparent was that the philosophy and ethics of the DWeb movement was ill defined. Could we say that a project is decentralized even if the organization behind the protocol or platform was as centralized, opaque, and unaccountable as any of the big tech monopolies? If not, what exactly delineates something like Facebook's Libra Coin from IPFS?